

REMARKS

Except as expressly discussed below, any changes made to the Application, including the claims, are not made in Reply to any rejection or other communication from the Examiner, but are made to improve the clarity, readability, or understanding of the application or a portion of the application that was changed. As is evident, none of the foregoing amendments was made to add new matter, and none was made to narrow the scope of the claims. Indeed, all amendments were made merely as cosmetic amendments to improve the readability and coherence of the resulting patent.

Status of Prosecution

Applicants filed the original application on February 1, 2002. The Examiner mailed a first, non-final office action on August 1, 2003. Applicants filed their Reply to the first office action on October 20, 2003. The Examiner mailed a final office action on January 13, 2004. This paper is in Reply to that office action. Applicants request reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejections raised in that office action.

Applicants are appreciative of the helpful and useful telephone conference conducted between Applicants' counsel and the Examiner and her supervisor on March 10, 2004.

Examiner's General Objections and Rejections

Claims 1-43, 45 and 46 are pending. In the current Office Action, the Examiner rejected claims 1-5, 9, 12, 13, 17-19, 21-23, 25-33, 40-43, 45, and 46; the Examiner objected to claims 6-8, 10, 11, 14-16, 20, 24, and 34-39.

On page 6 of the Office Action, the Examiner stated that claims 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14-16, 20, 24, and 34-39 would be allowable, although objected to, if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.

Although Applicants disagree with the arguments of the Examiner in the current office action, in the interests of expediting an early Notice of Allowance, Applicants have amended the claims of the Application as shown in this paper.

Applicant respectfully urges, therefore, that the objection and rejections of the Examiner be withdrawn. Amended claims 1-41 are believed allowable over the combined references, and the claims that depend from amended claims 1, 17 and 29 are believed allowable for at least the same reasons that support allowability of the independent claims.

Conclusions

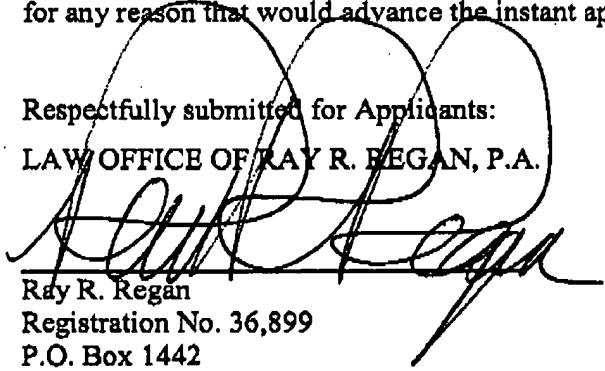
For the reasons set forth above, Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration and withdrawal of the identified rejections and objections to the claims.

5 The remaining references cited by the Examiner, but not relied on for the rejection of claims, have been noted. Because the remaining references are no more pertinent than the applied references, a detailed discussion of these remaining references is deemed unnecessary for a full and complete Reply to the Office Action.

10 Applicants also respectfully submit that Applicants have complied with 37 CFR §1.116 dealing with amendments of claims after a final action by appropriately canceling claims, complying with requirements of form, and amending the rejected claims to place the rejected claims in better form for consideration by the Examiner. In addition, Applicant respectfully submits that the actions taken by Applicant do not raise new issues that would require further consideration or a new search, do not raise new matter, and do place the application in better
15 form for appeal by materially reducing or simplifying the issues.

In conclusion, Applicant respectfully asserts that this Reply is complete as contemplated in 37 CFR §1.111, that claims 1-41 are patentable for the reasons set forth above, and that the Application is now in condition for allowance. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests an early notice of allowance. The Examiner is requested to call the undersigned at (505) 897-7200
20 for any reason that would advance the instant application to issue.

Respectfully submitted for Applicants:
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